

**Homily for September 30, 2001
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Amos 6:1a,4-7
1 Timothy 6:11-16
Luke 16:19-31**

Can we see now?

This great story of the rich man and Lazarus is especially hard to hear in the aftermath of the terrorists' attacks on the symbols of our wealth and power – the Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. It makes me question whether we may have been blind to the plight of the poor which could generate such hatred. Or is it a religious backlash which is bringing such suffering?

I am put in mind of a letter written by Pope Paul VI in 1967 entitled "On the Development of Peoples," in which he warned the rich nations of the first world in words that sting to the core still today: "We must repeat once more that the superfluous wealth of rich countries should be placed at the service of poor nations. Otherwise their continued greed will certainly call down upon them the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor, which consequences no one can foretell." Have those words come home to roost?

In Luke chapter 16, the rich man does not see Lazarus who had lain at his gate, until the rich man and Lazarus are both dead and the chasm between

them is eternally-fixed. During his lifetime, the rich man's wealth created a gulf that made him blind to the suffering of the poor man. Now he can gaze on him only when it is too late. Ultimately, he is condemned not because he is rich, but because he didn't even notice the poor man at his gate. In this way Saint Luke reminds the readers that riches have a way of blinding us to reality.

With that said, however, it would be the rare churchgoer who walks past the homeless person without a twinge of relationship and responsibility. Catholics are among the most socially responsive people in the United States – witness our empire of hospitals, schools, and agencies at the service of the poor. We employ lobbyists in the corridors of power at the state and federal level, and our presence in activist organizations is legion. Catholics can hardly keep their noses out of politics, and even when we may be inclined to do so personally our bishops and even our pope drag us in corporately by association.

Yet this flurry of activity on behalf of the poor, this absence of complacency on ivory couches, as the prophet Amos mentions in chapter 6, all this activity does not absolve us or make us immune to the accusations of our possible blindness. As long as our sisters and brothers are in want, the Body of Christ

hangs on the cross. It's one of the reasons we remain partial to crucifixes. They remind us that Christ still suffers among us.

This week and for the next several, we'll be visiting neighborhoods tapping on doors, letting people know that God loves them and trying to uncover their needs and offering to connect them with ways to get help. We'll be doing a lot of listening – we do this on the local level in this little way; perhaps we need to do the same as a country to nations at our door that harbor such hatred in the name of the same God we believe in. If we are genuinely concerned about being good people, let alone better Christians and followers of the Gospel, there is no getting away from justice. or love of neighbor. Or feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless – whoever is Lazarus in our time and at our door. Religion is love, and justice as well as love. Religion is love of neighbor as oneself. Religion is blessing the food at meals and bringing the blessing of food to those without it. Religion is worshipping God – and washing the feet of the poor. Religion is a pilgrimage to heaven in company with people of every race and nation – a journey which requires that we first see – that we open our eyes and our ears so that together we might journey into the kingdom of God. Pope John Paul II has constantly invoked this parable of the rich man and Lazarus to challenge the rich nations of the world to see the impoverished people – who are often at their very door step.

Let us pray: “God of the all people, you never cease to companion those in need. Companion us as we seek to see more clearly the needs of all. We bless and praise you for the abundance given us and ask your wisdom to use and share your gifts wisely and well. We ask this though Christ our Lord. Amen.”

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